Plato's *Republic*

Book X

Critique of Artistic Imitation *(mimēsis)*

- This critique is carried out with greater *metaphysical* and *psychological* sophistication than in Book III. He suggests that the artist—whether painter or poet—is at a ***"third generation [remove] from nature,"*** i.e., his work is a faint but deceptive reflection of what is real. He makes this point with the couch illustration (597b-). ***{ form → figure$_1$ → thing$_2$ → image$_3$ }***
- This argument raises any number of questions: e.g., why can't an artist work ***directly*** from the Forms, as a craftsman does *indirectly* when he is guided by an enlightened user? ***{PK → kallipolis; Parmenides}***
- Plato has unusual ideas about artistic creation, but we should note they do follow

- For example, he discounts the “charm” of musical form, focusing instead on the frequent ***banality of its lyrics*** (601b). His concern here and elsewhere seems to be the ***show of learning*** made by poets (whose broad but *shallow* knowledge resembles that of *journalists*); with enticing words and rhythms, they trick the listener into thinking that poetry is a source of great wisdom, while it is really a ***patina*** of such wisdom, with *a shiny surface but a hollow interior*.
- Plato’s psychological analysis of *drama* is also quite perceptive. He frets that plays, because they focus on the ***observable***, are biased toward the portrayal of *emotionally unhinged but “dramatic” characters* rather than the more deserving but less interesting “prudent and quiet character” (604e). Such biases threaten to *accentuate undesirable passions*

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Letter to D'Alembert* makes many of these same points; he explicitly notes his debt to Book X of the *Republic*.
- Plato ends this section on a conciliatory note, however, suggesting that "so much of poetry as is hymns to the gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city" and that the poets would generously be given ***the opportunity to defend Homer and themselves before being purged*** (607a, 608a)!
- *Can even the kallipolis do without poetry?* Myth of Er, etc.: spoon-feeding truth to the producer class.
- To paraphrase Clemenceau: **art is too**

Argument for Immortality

- The core of the argument is at 609d-e. Socrates argues here that
  1. the *diseases of the soul* ("injustice and the rest of vice"), though they weaken it, do not destroy it and detach it from the body, and
  2. it is "unreasonable that a thing be destroyed by a badness that is alien and not by one that is its own," i.e., a soul shouldn't be destroyed by *bodily diseases*.
- These two points lead Socrates to conclude that the soul is ***immortal*** and ***indestructible***, though it can be "*maimed* by community with the body and other evils" (611c). (See Plato's *Phaedo* for a more thorough discussion of this.)

The Myth of Er

- After Socrates asks for the ***"wages"*** of justice back (612c), he describes the rewards and punishments of virtue and vice, respectively, *in this life*, at the hands of both men and gods. He then turns to the *afterlife* in the controversial but much celebrated Myth of Er.
- Ostensibly, this Myth (*muthos*) simply allows Socrates to complete his claim (at 358a) that justice is a ***Category 2 good*** and thus intrinsically *and instrumentally* desirable.
- Some (such as Leo Strauss), however, have suggested that the Myth of Er, like the Myth of Metals or the Myth of the Cave, is a ***drug*** administered to the masses, who are unable to understand the complex philosophical argument for virtue in the rest of the *Republic* (see 389b-c & 459d).

1. Souls in the afterlife receive *tenfold* rewards and punishments for each one of their just and unjust acts, respectively, *over a thousand year period* (615b). The "wages of sin," indeed….
2. They are then taken before the **Fates**, who make them choose *"lots and patterns of lives"* (617d). The ***lot*** determines the order in which they are allowed to ***choose*** among the *patterns of life* cast before them, which they will follow when *reincarnated*. **Thus, *luck and skill* determine one's fate, here as in life.** (Cf. Nussbaum, who thinks that Plato tries to purge luck from his moral philosophy

3. ***This skill of choosing the right life for oneself can only be developed while one is alive.*** As Socrates notes, "on this account [of the afterlife] each of us must, to the neglect of other studies, above all see to it that he is a seeker and student of that study by which he might be able to learn and find out ***who*** *will give him the capacity and the knowledge to* ***distinguish the good and the bad life***, and so everywhere and always to choose the better from among those that are possible" (618c).

   In other words, the nature of the *afterlife* should motivate the search for wisdom *in this life*. The dangers of ***virtue without wisdom*** (Cephalus) are graphically demonstrated at **619c**, where a man who "lived in an orderly regime in his former life, *participating in virtue by habit but without philosophy*," chooses a pattern of life…*poorly*. Due to such unskilled choosing$_1$ and the luck of the draw$_2$, Plato says that "there [is] an ***exchange of evils***

4. Virtues developed in this life prove useful later in the Myth of Er as well, when the souls are led across a vast parched plain to the ***river of Lethe***, whose waters cause ***forgetfulness***. Socrates relates that "it was a necessity for all to drink a certain measure of the water, *but those who were not saved by* ***prudence*** *drank more than the measure*" (621b).

   Though not developed, this point suggests that those who are "saved by prudence [*phronēsis*]" may retain a *faint, even subconscious knowledge of their experiences in the afterlife,* which will help motivate virtuous behavior during their new lives on earth. Virtue (*aretē*) helps us to "make a good crossing of the river of Lethe" (621c).

   As both 3. and 4. indicate, the Myth of Er is designed to ***motivate the pursuit of philosophy****,* so the Myth can serve not just as a *substitute* for philosophy (Strauss), but as a